**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Smoothing the Path* describes successful state-level strategies and policy lessons that have been learned in four states during the development of schools that integrate secondary and postsecondary education. Statewide efforts in the multi-year Early College High School Initiative, which began in Ohio and Utah in 2002 and in Texas and Georgia in 2004, show how the barriers are being addressed. JFF asked the organizations coordinating the initiative in those states to prepare the case studies to help both education leaders who are designing similar schools and policymakers who are exploring how to sustain and expand them.

Because implementing early college high schools requires coordination between secondary and postsecondary education policies, the cases also expose the systemic misalignment that must be addressed to improve the transition from high school to and through postsecondary education—indeed of early college high schools themselves. In other words, the fledgling early college high school movement points to challenges states face in building more robust dual enrollment programs, expanding Advanced Placement opportunities, and promoting other approaches that integrate high school and college work.

The case studies in *Smoothing the Path* present the first steps in a long-term agenda to align and integrate grades 9 through 14 so that students can move more seamlessly into postsecondary education. Two case studies look at changes in fiscal policy to support early college high schools; two address improvements in alignment across high school and college.

**Fiscal Policies**

*Ohio:* KnowledgeWorks Foundation has been integral to advancing research-based policy recommendations and educating state and local policymakers about the probable benefits of early college high schools. The legislature has approved a KnowledgeWorks proposal that the state budget include two years of “supplemental” funding for the support of early
college high school partnerships through both the Department of Education and the Board of Regents. This funding totals more than $8 million.

Utah: The Utah Partnership for Education, Inc., has engaged business and political leaders who are working to secure federal and private grants to create sustainable capital funding sources for early college high schools. A feasibility study for each proposed early college high school assesses issues related to the policy, regulatory, funding, and space environments. This past legislative session, the legislature appropriated $8.3 million for concurrent enrollment. An additional $2.1 million was appropriated to the last three early college high schools for start-up costs and facilities.

Alignment

Georgia: The University System of Georgia has secured an exemption that allows early college high schools to use a framework of P-14 competencies being developed by the state—through its efforts to create a coordinated P-16 education system—for determining each student’s college course readiness, rather than the typical minimum combined GPA and SAT score requirements. Georgia also provides full tuition funding through the ACCEL Grant program for high school students to enroll in college classes.

Texas: The support of state leaders for early college high schools and the alignment of this effort with other education initiatives have resulted in processes for identifying and addressing unique policy needs. For example, the Texas Education Agency and Communities Foundation of Texas have organized a statewide Early College High School Working Group of K-16 education leaders. The group identified needed rule changes, which led to a proposal by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to give early college high schools enough discretion to determine each student’s college readiness and the number of college courses they may take, using state-approved assessments under the Texas Success Initiative.

Lessons for the Field

Smoothing the Path also summarizes the advice the intermediaries would give to future early college high school developers:

• Gain early support from key state leaders and stakeholders;
• Coordinate P-16 education policies with the development of early college high schools; and
• Make the case for financing integrated courses of study.

To the degree early college high schools succeed in raising student outcomes in terms of both completing high school and a postsecondary credential, they can serve as critical evidence in support of expanding—perhaps making permanent—policy changes that fundamentally change the structure of the transition from high school to college.